

One Woman's Experience of Emancipation

JN 1886, pending the execution of the Chicago anarchists, Dr. Edward Aveling visited this country for the purpose of promoting sympathy for the convicted men, and, if possible, securing their pardon. Dr. Aveling was the intimate friend of Karl Marx, the ablest and most authoritative writer which the Socialist movement has yet produced, and assisted in the translation of Marx's chief work, "Das Kapital," into English. He was accompanied by Eleanor, daughter of Karl Marx, a bright and gifted woman, and an enthusiastic adherent of her father's political views, including the emancipation of woman through industrial and political equality. It was not generally known in this country at that time that Dr. Aveling had an invalid wife living in England, and Eleanor Marx was known here as Mrs. Aveling.

It was my fortune to meet these people and to listen to a discussion, carried on in the presence of many witnesses, of the teachings of Socialism in regard to marriage. I subjoin a strictly impartial report of the interview furnished by Miss N. H———, one of the ladies present, to the *Chicago Tribune*, November 14, 1886:

SOCIALISM IN THE HOME.—DOES IT MEAN FREE LOVE AND POLYGAMY?

During Dr. and Mrs. Aveling's recent visit to Chicago a conversation was held in which they presented some of their views on Socialism to a few friends invited to meet them.

The doctor opened the subject by giving a general statement of the meaning and aims of Socialism; but when some questions were asked about its influence on the home, he referred the question to his wife, as she had given those lines of thought her particular study, and was, therefore, better qualified to speak than he.

Mrs. Aveling is a charming little woman, full of courage and enthusiasm, evidently devoted to her cause and to her husband. It was really very delightful to see the cordial understanding existing between them and the proud confidence that each reposed in the other. Mrs. Aveling said that love is the only recognized marriage in Socialism, consequently no bonds of any kind would be required; that divorces would be impossible, as there would be nothing to divorce, for when love ceased, separation would naturally ensue. A gentleman asked: "Do you mean that if I have a wife who has grown old and sickly, I can put her away and take a young and healthy one?"*

* This is precisely what Dr. Aveling had done and it may have been to that fact that Mrs. Aveling's hesitation was due.

Mrs. Aveling hesitated for a moment, but only a moment, for she is brave and has the courage of her convictions; then she answered: "Yes, you could, but we would make you ashamed of such an act." She did not explain how they would make him ashamed, when they admitted such an act in their code, such a principal in their ethics. Public opinion is general approval or disapproval; how could they teach the disapproval of that which they advocated?

In the meeting at Turner Hall, Sunday evening, November 7, Dr. Aveling referred to a paper on Socialism which he had been told had been recently read in a club composed of women who represented the culture and ability of Chicago; and in that paper the essayist claimed that Socialism might lead to communism in wives, and consequently to the destruction of the home. He appeared to be intensely annoyed at such an interpretation of socialistic teachings and surprised that a cultivated woman could read in their principles anything so opposed to their ideas.

This essayist* so deeply deplored, happened to be present at the conversation which is the subject of this article, though she knew nothing of the reference made to her and the club in Dr. Aveling's Sunday evening lecture. She, in a very ladylike and earnest manner, said she had been devoting some time to the study of Socialism, and, while she was profoundly interested in its theories and found truth in some of its principles, still she hesitated to adopt the philosophy; as she thought it threatened the purity of women and the integrity of the home, and asked him his thought upon the subject, as though she had been convinced against her will and would gladly be disproved.

Dr. Aveling could scarcely wait for her to formulate her question. He moved uneasily in his chair, his open hands gradually closed and tightened into clenched fists, and as soon as possible he exclaimed that she was entirely mistaken, that she had read a meaning into the writings which did not exist, which was entirely foreign to their teachings. "When a woman of your culture," he declared, "fails to understand us, it fills me with despair; for what can we expect from the uncultured and ignorant?"

To divert the awkwardness occasioned by this remark another lady said: "I wonder, Dr. Aveling, if I have read into your and Mrs. Aveling's article on 'The Woman Question,' a meaning which you do not intend to convey? In that article do you not say that while you personally believe in monogamy, you still recognize the possibility that polygamy may be the outcome of Socialism?"

Here was as candid a question as had been presented to Mrs. Aveling, but he had not her courage. He evaded it by declaring impatiently and heatedly: "You have polygamy now." His questioner refused to accept that definition or interpretation of polygamy, and claimed that here one wife only was recognized by law, consequently

* Mrs. C. F. Corbin.

she was respected and the home protected, while polygamy legally recognized several wives—a great distinction, for that legal recognition of one wife only made all the difference between a Mohammedan harem and the Christian home.

Dr. Aveling only answered this by reading an extract from his article on "The Woman Question," in which are the following sentences:

"Whether monogamy or polygamy will obtain in the socialistic state is a detail on which we can only speak as an individual. The question is too large to be solved within the mists and miasmata of the capitalistic systems . . . and whether we are right or not in regarding monogamy as the best form of society, we may be sure that the best form will be chosen."

He then said he must close the conversation in order to take the train. Now the question arises, Was the essayist right who read the paper on Socialism to the club composed of Chicago's most cultured women, when she concluded that Socialism menaced the well-being of the home?

When we consider Mrs. Aveling's assertion that love recognizes no bonds, that divorces will be unknown because there will be no bonds to annul, that a man will be able to put away an old wife and take a young one, and that Dr. Aveling, while professing his own belief that monogamy "will win the day," still admits that victory may be on the side of polygamy, we think that the essayist's fears were well grounded and her conclusions just. Moreover, we think that Dr. Aveling was unfair when he denied the possibility of such a question arising from the study of Socialism.

ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CLUB.

The incident was widely commented upon by the newspaper press at the time. From a *Chicago Tribune* editorial, nearly a column in length, I clip the following:

During the recent visit of Dr. and Mrs. Aveling in this city, they were met in private by some members of the Woman's Club who asked them some direct questions as to the effect Socialism would have upon the home as it is recognized in all Christian countries. The substance of this interesting interview has already been printed in the *Tribune* and deserves some consideration, as it is the first time, we believe, that the views of these Socialistic representatives, as to the influence of their doctrines upon the condition of women and the status of the home, have been brought out. Dr. Aveling evidently did not like to define himself, but, when pressed into a corner from which he might have wriggled out, had the honesty to declare that while he personally believed in monogamy he must admit that polygamy might be the outcome of Socialism. Mrs. Aveling was more unreserved in her admissions. She frankly acknowledged there would be no obligations for a man and woman to remain together, and no bonds to hold them; that divorces would not be possible or necessary, as there would be nothing to divorce when people could separate at pleasure; and that a man could at any time put away an old wife for a younger one, or a sickly wife for a healthy one. In other words, the doctrine of elective

affinities would be carried to its utmost limits. Nothing would hold a man or woman together but individual choice, and where no obligation of any kind existed, and human nature was free to assert itself in all its meanness, if not in all its depravity, it is easy enough to picture the outcome of this promiscuous herding of men and women.

The American people will never have any sympathy with a doctrine that leads to promiscuous prostitution as a substitute for the family, and that would abolish the Christian home and set up a code of social morals by the side of which Mormon polygamy and the Mohammedan harem are commendable and altogether virtuous. Should such a calamity ever occur as the success of Socialism, the last of its confiscations will be the home—and after that chaos.”

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Only the brief, sad sequel of the story remains to be told. The writer, having met these two eminent advocates of Socialism face to face, was interested in tracing their future career. A few years after this interview, reports came through private sources, as well as the public press, that Dr. Aveling was notoriously unfaithful to his so-called wife, and that her life was darkened by his perfidy. Later came the news that his lawful wife, who had been an invalid for years, had passed away, and that he had married another woman. The bright, vivacious, gifted woman who had passed as his wife in Chicago was crazed by despair, and in an interview with her betrayer declared her intention to commit suicide, whereupon her faithless paramour went to a chemist's and bought the poison she demanded of him and coolly walked away while she committed the fatal deed. Eleanor Marx was at last emancipated.

The conduct of Dr. Aveling would have been the subject of a judicial investigation if his death had not occurred a few months after the tragedy above related.

CAROLINE F. CORBIN.

In view of the recent experience of Maxim Gorky and the woman who accompanied him from Russia to this country to expound and exemplify the doctrines of Socialism, the **Illinois Association Opposed to the Extension of Suffrage to Women**, takes occasion to reprint for the second time the foregoing paper, of which several thousand copies have been circulated among editors and legislators all over the country during the past six years. It will be seen that twenty years ago the views of Socialists concerning marriage, and the so-called emancipation of women, which have lately been exemplified by Herron, Gorky, and many others, were fully understood and expounded by anti-suffrage workers in Chicago. It may fairly be claimed that it was owing to the circulation of this little paper among editors, especially in our large cities that they were so on the alert to query the relations of Gorky and his paramour. It is with a deep sense of duty to the American public, therefore, that the Association issues this **third** edition of the pamphlet, feeling assured by long and deep study of the subject that woman suffrage is but one phase of a revolutionary movement which has for its aim the entire destruction of our present social and political institutions and the substitution of an anarchistic scheme of government opposed alike to good order, good morals, and the whole fabric of Christian civilization.